



# JUSTICE ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT



## FULL REPORT

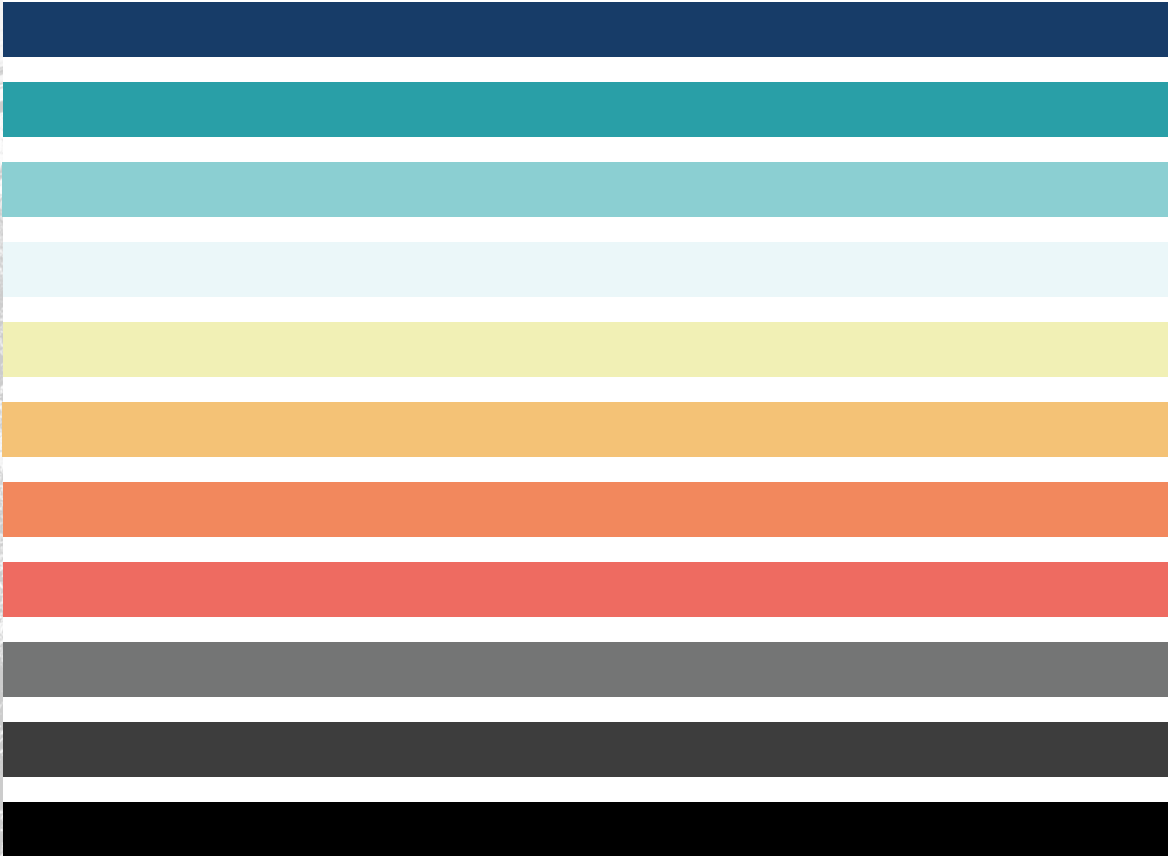
*Establishing a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)  
in compliance with Senate Bill 476*

*November 9th, 2021*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to extend thanks to all our colleagues who contributed to this report.  
To find this report online, please go to (<https://jad.harriscountytexas.gov>)



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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I. BACKGROUND

II. WHAT IS THE INCIDENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT?

III. WHAT IS A SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAM (SART)?

IV. WHY IS A SART NEEDED?

V. WHAT IS SENATE BILL 476 BY SENATOR JANE NELSON?

VI. WHO SERVES ON THE SART?

VII. WHAT DOES THE SART HAVE TO DO?

VIII. PROPOSED CANDIDATES FOR THE SART

IX. NEXT STEPS

X. APPENDIX A: BIOGRAPHIES OF SART CANDIDATES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

XI. REFERENCES



## I. BACKGROUND

On October 12, 2021, Commissioners Court approved a motion made by Commissioner Adrian Garcia instructing the Justice Administration Department (JAD) to coordinate with all relevant stakeholders necessary to form a Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) in full compliance with SB 476 by Senator Jane Nelson. JAD was instructed to return to Court on November 9, 2021, with a list of candidates for Commissioners Court to appoint as inaugural members of the County's adult sexual assault response team, including the Chief Administrator entity, and to call the team's first meeting in accordance with Subchapter J, Chapter 351, of the Local Government Code. To fulfill this request, JAD has written this memo which includes the following content:

- A discussion of the incidence of sexual assault nationwide, in Texas, and in Harris County;
- A description of what sexual assault response teams (SARTs) are and what they do;
- A description of Senate Bill 476, the requirements of this bill, and the duties of the SART;
- A list of candidates for the inaugural SART; and
- The next steps, with a timeline, for the SART.

## II. WHAT IS THE INCIDENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT?

According to the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), in 2019, there were an estimated 139,815 rapes<sup>A</sup> reported to law enforcement. However, this may underestimate the extent of sexual assault since many survivors do not report their victimization to law enforcement. Only about 23% of survivors nationwide reported their victimization to law enforcement in 2020.<sup>1</sup>

According to the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), in 2019, there were 459,310 rape/sexual assaults nationwide, and in 2020 there were 319,950. Many survivors may still not disclose their assault to the NCVS, thus still underestimating the actual extent of victimization.

Other research has attempted to examine sexual assault and get a better estimate of the extent of this victimization. An estimated 1 in 5 women in the United States (or 25.5 million women) reported a completed or attempted rape at some point during their lifetime.<sup>2</sup> For men in the United States, approximately 27.6 million (or 24.8%) experienced some form of sexually violent contact in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup> However, these still underestimate the extent of sexual assault. Even if the actual extent of sexual assault is not known, it is a serious problem affecting many individuals, and there needs to be better responses for survivors.

In Texas, in 2020, there were 13,327 rapes and 16,969 sexual assaults reported. However, this is only capturing those cases reported to law enforcement, so this would still underestimate the actual extent of the crime.<sup>4</sup> In 2019, there were 2,573 reported rapes in Harris County. In 2020, there were 2,495 reported rapes in Harris County, which is down 3.5% from 2019.<sup>B</sup>

<sup>A</sup> This is the revised definition used by the UCR. "The revised UCR definition of rape is penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim. Attempts or assaults to commit rape are also included in the statistics presented here; however, statutory rape and incest are excluded" (<https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/rape>).

<sup>B</sup> <https://jad.harriscountytexas.gov/Data/Index-Crimes-Stats>

### III. WHAT IS A SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAM (SART)?

Survivors of sexual assault have traditionally not received the best treatment by the criminal justice system; in recognition of improving the treatment of sexual assault survivors, the use of Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) was first developed in the 1970s. These were created to improve the community's response to sexual assault. SARTs are community-level interventions that provide a holistic and collaborative approach to responding to and treating survivors of sex crimes. "Many SARTs adopt a 'victim-centered' philosophy in their work, meaning their fundamental priorities are to ensure victims' choices regarding their participation in these systems are respected, and all victims are treated with sensitivity and consideration by all systems."<sup>5</sup> Currently, there are hundreds of SARTs in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

These teams include individuals from different disciplines, community organizations, and criminal justice system agencies such as law enforcement, forensic nurse examiners, victim advocates, and prosecutors.<sup>7</sup> "SARTs work together as a group for the welfare and benefit of the victim in an attempt to eliminate confusion, anxiety, and negative experiences."<sup>8</sup> These teams also work to ensure survivors receive the necessary services at every stage of their case (i.e., from report to final disposition) and that survivors are treated with respect and dignity.

There is variation in the way SARTs work and many different ways of operating a SART. Some are highly formalized collaborative groups, while others rely on informal information sharing and relationship building with the various systems. Many facilitate cross-disciplinary training to understand roles and share knowledge. Most "engage in regular collaborative meetings [which] may be used to discuss issues with their community's response to sexual assault, delineate the desired response, create ways to implement and institutionalize the desired response (e.g., training responders, adopting policies, and protocols), and create accountability to the desired response."<sup>9</sup> SARTs also vary in their organizational structure. Most have a formal leader to facilitate and coordinate meetings, though not all do. Even though SARTs vary in organization and operation, their core mission is the same: to prioritize victims' needs and improve community response to sexual assault.<sup>10</sup> Although there is limited research on the effectiveness of SARTs, one study found that improvements associated with the SART included shorter reporting delays, more types of forensic evidence collected, higher arrest rates, higher victim participation in the criminal justice system, and higher charging rates. There are mixed results on whether having a SART impacts conviction rates, with some indicating they did not make a difference while others find SARTs help increase conviction rates.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, "studies have yet to ask the victims themselves about their experiences to see whether, from their perspective, the SART has had a positive impact."<sup>12</sup>

### IV. WHY IS A SART NEEDED?

Two out of three sexual assaults will go unreported to law enforcement.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the University of Texas-Austin research showed that only 9.2 percent of Texans reported their assault to law enforcement, and even less to other service providers, consistent with other national findings on reporting.<sup>14</sup> Many survivors do not seek formal services following victimization either because they are not aware of these services, fear the systems will not be helpful or hurt their well-being, or believe the services are inaccessible. Even those who report their victimization to law enforcement, many survivors live without feeling safe or supported enough to seek services and assistance. Additionally, "survivors who do seek help are often denied services, treated negatively, and inadequately supported by systems personnel."<sup>15</sup> Further, even of those assaults that are reported to law enforcement, many perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions. Case outcomes for sexual assault are very poor. A recent study showed that even for those who reported, there was only a 19 percent arrest rate, with 6 percent pleading guilty and 2 percent going to trial.<sup>16</sup> Conviction rates for sexual assault are also low, with only 7-16 percent of cases resulting in the incarceration

of the offender.<sup>17</sup> In order to empower survivors with choice, it is incumbent upon the government systems stakeholders to create policies and procedures that are trauma-informed and survivor-centered. The coordination of services, such as with a SART, provides opportunities to improve response to survivors and their cases, improve help-seeking rates, legal outcomes, and survivors' experiences with the criminal justice system.

## V. WHAT IS SENATE BILL 476 BY SENATOR JANE NELSON?

In order to create systems that are sensitive and responsive to the needs of survivors, Senate Bill 476 was passed by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Abbott. This bill established county adult sexual assault response teams and outlined the minimum composition, duties, and responsibilities of these teams. SB 476 mandates the creation of a county-based sexual assault response team. The responders who would be members in the SART (e.g., prosecutors, law enforcement officers, etc.) are already individually mandated to respond to adult victims of sexual assault in Texas. However, "this law requires that all parties begin the process of working more closely together to maximize resources, reduce trauma, and ensure compliance with crime victims' rights."<sup>18</sup> The response team consists of experts to improve practice in the investigation and prosecution of sexual assaults while also prioritizing the health and safety of survivors. This team brings together stakeholders with subject matter expertise and will create a written protocol that establishes their community processes for investigating and prosecuting sexual assaults through a client-centered and trauma-informed approach. The team is charged with creating such protocols and maintaining data on the number of sexual assaults reported to law enforcement, investigations, and prosecution of such offenses that will culminate in a written report to Commissioners Court. These protocols will be made available to various law enforcement agencies and treatment providers throughout Harris County.

## VI. WHO SERVES ON THE SART?<sup>c</sup>

SB 476 requires counties to create response teams that involve practitioners and those with expertise in responding/providing services to adult survivors of sexual violence. The team shall consist of:

- Chief Administrator of a Sexual Assault Program that provides services within the County;
- A prosecutor with jurisdiction over adult sexual assault cases in the County;
- The Sheriff of the County, or their designee;
- The Chief of the largest municipal law enforcement agency, if one exists, or their designee;
- A sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Forensic Examiner that provides exams within the County, or if they do not exist, a representative from the largest healthcare provider in the County;
- A mental or behavioral health provider within the County, or if they do not exist a representative from the public health department; and
- Other persons or professionals the SART considers necessary for the operation of the response team.<sup>d</sup>

The SART shall elect a presiding officer, and the team will meet at least four times a year. The team will create guidelines, forms, or protocols that streamline and enhance the practice while coordinating the many agencies involved. The first meeting of the SART must be called no later than December 1, 2021. At this meeting, members will appoint the initial presiding officer.

<sup>c</sup> The professionals specifically named above are the minimum team required by SB 476 (Texas Association Against Sexual Assault).

<sup>d</sup> The presiding officer or team may decide to expand their membership to other individuals or professionals, but the first six specifically named are the minimum membership required by law (TAASA, 2021. Strengthening Community Responses for Adult Survivors: An Introduction to SARTs in Texas).

## VII. WHAT DOES THE SART HAVE TO DO?

The response team must meet at least quarterly each year. No later than the 90th day after the last day of a regular legislative session, the SART must review and amend any response team protocols, forms, or guidelines required by Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 351, Subchapter J. Once the SART has selected their leadership, it must develop a written protocol for responding to adult survivors within the community. The SART must present a report to their Commissioners Court no later than December 1 of each odd-numbered year. That report must include a list of active members, a copy of their written protocol, and a summary of report numbers and dispositions.

The team is charged with developing a written protocol that addresses the interagency coordinated response for adult survivors in the County that includes:

- Procedures used in investigating adult sexual assault cases;
- Interagency information sharing that is timely and comports with legal requirements;
- The location and accessibility of sexual assault forensic examinations;
- Information on the accessibility of medical care;
- Procedures for ensuring survivors are offered access to sexual assault program advocates;
- Information related to sexual assault service providers;
- Information on availability and accessibility of behavioral health services;
- Protocol for law enforcement to keep survivors abreast of the status of the investigation and court proceedings;
- An assessment of community-related trends in sexual assault;
- Biennial evaluation through case reviews of the effectiveness of individual agency and interagency protocols and systems;
- At least four hours of cross-agency training on the dynamics of sexual assault for SART members; and
- Methods for resolving conflict and maintaining confidentiality within the response team.

The protocols created by the response team should prioritize the health and safety of survivors while ensuring a collaborative process among all agencies involved in sexual assault cases to increase the efficacy of response and minimize survivor traumatization. Failure to follow a guideline or protocol created by the response team does not create a legal cause of action or preclude the admissibility of evidence in criminal court proceedings.

The SART needs to develop this written protocol for investigating and prosecuting sexual assault no later than December 1, 2022. This protocol must be trauma-sensitive and survivor-focused. This protocol will be focused on adult survivors, but the SART may coordinate with the Child Abuse Multidisciplinary team to create or enhance protocols for child victims.

In addition to this protocol, the SART, in accordance with SB 476, must complete a biannual summary with the following data:

- The number of sexual assault reports received by local law enforcement agencies;
- The number of investigations conducted as a result of these reports;
- The number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition of these; and
- The number of reports of sexual assault for which no indictment was presented.

The meetings of the SART are not subject to Chapter 551 of the Government Code. However, the team can request or allow the attendance of a person who is not a member of the team at a meeting. Information and records acquired by the SART are confidential and not subject to disclosure under Chapter 552 of the Government Code. However, a report or statistical compilation of data reports created by the SART is public, provided it does not contain any personally identifiable information.

The SART may only review a case of an adult survivor with the signed, written consent of the survivor. This consent must specify:

- The information or records covered by the release;
- The reason/purpose for the release; and
- The person or agency to which the information is to be released.

Although not explicitly a part of SB 476, this SART should institutionalize best practices no matter who is leading. Leaders need to work together, for long-term community-based, holistic responses that are focused on the needs of the survivor.

Additionally, since Harris County is so large and diverse, there should be a Harris County SART, in compliance with SB 476, but due to this diversity and magnitude, the SART should build into the leadership structure subcommittees, which represent smaller areas within the County. These subcommittees could provide information regarding sexual assault within communities inside larger Harris County. Additionally, if communities within Harris County decide to create their own, smaller SARTs who can work with the larger Harris County SART, they should be supported in their effort.

## VIII. PROPOSED CANDIDATES FOR THE SART

The following is a list of proposed members for the inaugural SART. These were chosen due to their expertise and to comply with SB 476. Harris County currently has a Sexual Assault Steering Committee which fulfills much of the requirements of SB 476. This Sexual Assault Steering Committee was formed in 2014 following the work of a multi-disciplinary team (Houston's Action Research Project) funded by the National Institute of Justice in 2011 that sought to understand the factors that contributed to the high volume of unsubmitted sexual assault kits following the sexual assault kit backlog research project. The original group consisted of the Forensic Science Center, Harris County District Attorney's Office (HCDAO), Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC), Houston Police Department Sex Crimes Unit, Memorial Herman Health System, Harris Health System, and two universities. Since then, the Committee has added partners. The group works collaboratively to improve responses to sexual assault. Since this Committee already includes many of those individuals required by SB 476 to serve on the SART, many of the recommended members for the SART are those who currently serve on this Committee.

In addition to these members, SB 476 requires a member from the county sheriff's office. We have designated Lt. Gale Johnson, Sgt. Tommy Smith, and Deputy Oscar Cisneros to fulfill this role. Although the SART is charged with examining adult sexual assault cases, there is an overlap between domestic violence and sexual assault. Many survivors of domestic violence are also survivors of sexual assault.<sup>19</sup> The sexual assault centers in Harris County are all dual programs, meaning that they provide domestic and sexual violence services. Though the definition of sexual assault covers those in intimate partner violence (IPV) relationships, the focus of the SART is solely on sexual assault to not continue the gap of non-IPV sexual assaults (e.g., date rape, acquaintance rape, etc.). Though the SART can create subcommittees that can help address issues specific to sexual assault within the context of IPV or issues con-



cerning certain survivors (e.g., immigrant survivors, those in the LGBTQ+ community, etc.). Additional partners, such as members of the Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (HCDVCC) or the Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative (HILSC), can be recommended by the presiding officer of the SART per SB 476, and would be valuable to the SART as they are already coordinating around a similar crime type and have knowledge of specialized survivor communities (e.g., immigrant survivors of crime).

We have suggested several names to fulfill each position required by SB 476 for the inaugural SART so that in the event of sickness or time conflicts (e.g., Court), there will be someone to fulfill each necessary role when the SART meets. Additionally, by doing so, if someone is transferred to another department within an agency (e.g., transferred from victim services to another department within a police agency) or leaves the agency, there will be no vacancies on the SART that would need to be fulfilled by returning to Commissioners Court per SB 476.

Please refer to **Appendix A:** on page 11 of this memo for brief biographies and photographs of each proposed member.

- **Chief Administrator of sexual assault program**
  - Emilee Whitehurst, President & CEO of Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)
  - Sonia Corrales, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)
- **A prosecutor with jurisdiction over adult sexual assault cases in the County**
  - Johna Stallings (primary), Division Chief of Adult Sex Crimes and Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office
  - Jamie Burro (back-up), Felony Chief Adult Sex Crimes and Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office
  - Celeste Byrom (back-up), Division Chief and Director of Victim Services Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office
- **The Sheriff of the County, or their designee**
  - Lieutenant Gale Johnson, Adult Special Crimes Section, Harris County Sheriff's Office
  - Sergeant Tommy Smith, Adult Special Crimes Section, Harris County Sheriff's Office
  - Deputy Oscar Cisneros, Deputy Investigator, Criminal Investigations Bureau, Adult Special Crimes Section, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Harris County Sheriff's Office
- **The Chief of the largest municipal law enforcement agency, if one exists, or their designee;**
  - Lieutenant Jacinda J. Gunter, Special Victims Division, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Houston Police Department
  - Commander Hong-Le Conn, Special Victims Division, Houston Police Department
  - Commander Harlan Daniel Harris, Victim Services, Houston Police Department
- **A sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Forensic Examiner that provides exams within the County, or if they do not exist, a representative from the largest healthcare provider in the County;**
  - Dr. Amy Castillo, Chief Operating Officer, Houston Forensic Science Center
  - Courtney Head, Manager of Forensic Biology, Houston Forensic Science Center
  - Jamie Ferrell, Clinical Director, Memorial Hermann Health System, Forensic Nursing Services
  - Dr. Sally Henin, Chief of Medical Operations, Memorial Hermann Health Systems, Forensic Nursing Operations
  - Sandra Sanchez, Program Director, Forensic Nursing Harris Health System
  - Dr. Khara Breeden, Chief Executive Officer, The Forensic Center of Excellence
  - Micala Clark, Legal Counsel, The Forensic Center of Excellence

- A mental or behavioral health provider within the County, or if they do not exist a representative from the public health department; and
  - Wayne Young, Chief Executive Officer, The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD
- Other persons or professionals the SART considers necessary for the operation of the response team<sup>E</sup>
  - Brenda Sykes, Executive Director, Bay Area Turning Point, Inc.
  - Wykesha Dixon, Program Director, at Bay Area Turning Point, Inc.
  - Olivia Rivers, CEO/Executive Director, The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc.
  - Barbie Brashear, Executive Director, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council
  - Monica Gonzales, Senior Litigator, Felony Trial Division, Harris County Public Defender's Office

## IX. NEXT STEPS

The following are the next steps to take regarding the SART to make sure Harris County is in full compliance with SB 476:

- Commissioners Court must appoint inaugural members to the SART. JAD and HAWC are requesting the Commissioners Court approve all the candidates presented in this memo to be members of the inaugural SART;
- Once approved, Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC) will take over the administration of the SART, transitioning it from JAD. HAWC will serve as the initial Administrator until the SART meets, elects a presiding officer, and determines the leadership structure.
  - HAWC will schedule a meeting for the members of the SART prior to December 1, 2021;
    - At this initial meeting, members of the SART must elect a presiding officer.
    - Once a presiding officer is elected, the SART will determine additional members necessary for its operation.
    - Additionally, the SART will discuss how best to collaborate and share information with criminal justice systems, local law enforcement agencies, and service providers not already serving on the SART.
    - Per SB 476, these members can be included based on the presiding officer's recommendations and current SART members and do not need Commissioners Court approval.
  - At this first meeting, the SART should:
    - Schedule future meetings in 2022 (which need to be quarterly);
    - Begin working on by-laws and organization structure (e.g., subcommittees); and
    - Begin writing protocol and collecting data in compliance with SB 476, which needs to be completed by December 1, 2022.

<sup>E</sup>The intention is that the presiding officer of the SART work with other members to determine additional partners to be included. Once the SART meets, per SB 476, the presiding officer, along with the team, can recommend other persons or professionals the team considers necessary for its operation (e.g., members from additional law enforcement agencies, service providers who work with specific survivor communities [e.g., LGBTQ+ survivors]).

## X. APPENDIX A: BIOGRAPHIES OF SART CANDIDATES IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

### Barbie Brashear, Executive Director, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council



Barbie Brashear is the Executive Director for the Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, a non-profit organization that works to coordinate a community response to domestic violence in Harris County, Texas. She attended Indiana University, where she earned a Bachelor's Degree in social work, and the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, where she earned her MSW. She has worked in the domestic and sexual violence field for 26 years and has provided leadership to sexual assault programs, domestic violence programs, and long-term housing programs for over 20 years.

She is adjunct faculty at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, and she is an expert witness in domestic violence cases. She is an expert trainer in Domestic Violence Dynamics, Safety Planning and Lethality Assessment, Screening and Assessing for Domestic Violence in the Healthcare Setting, Understanding Risk Assessment for Battering Intervention, Coordinated Community Response, Case Management with survivors, Trauma Informed Care with Survivors, Self-Care for Professionals, Domestic Violence Impact on Children, The Intersection of Domestic Violence and Homelessness, Understanding Domestic Violence and Mental Illness, Crisis Intervention for Survivors, Boundaries, and Stress. She has presented and trained at multiple local and statewide conferences on domestic and sexual violence, and she has provided training to hundreds of law enforcement professionals, health care professionals, advocates, social service providers, criminal justice system professionals, teachers, students, and the general public. She has provided case management and advocacy services to victims for over 20 years.

### Dr. Khara Breeden, Chief Executive Officer, The Forensic Center of Excellence



Khara Breeden completed her Doctorate of Nursing Practice at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, in August 2016. Khara holds a Master's of Science in Patient Safety Leadership from the University of Chicago at Illinois. Her Bachelor's degree is from Regis University in Denver, Colorado. Her nursing career spans over 18 years with experience in critical care, emergency services, women's health, academia, and most currently, forensic nursing. Khara began working as a forensic nurse in 2011 and immersed herself in the field. In 2017, while working with community partners, the gap in forensic nursing services was recognized, in response Khara formulated Harris County Forensic Nursing Services (HCFNE), now Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners, a non-profit, community based forensic nursing program, where she currently serves as the Chief Executive Officer. In 2018, Khara was recognized by the Texas Nurses Association as one of the "Top 20 Nurses" in the region. In 2019, she was honored by The Houston Business Journal as an "Outstanding Health Care practitioner." In 2020, she was recognized as Houston Business Journal's, "Most Admired CEO" award. Khara serves as the Board Secretary for Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) and is the President-Elect of the Board of the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN). She is also a working group member of the Texas Sexual Assault Survivor's Task Force, led by the Governor's office.

### Jamie Burro, Felony Chief of Adult Sex Crimes & Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office

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Jamie Burro is an Assistant District Attorney in the Adult Sex Crimes and Human Trafficking Division of the Harris County District Attorney's Office. She graduated from Texas A&M University in 2003 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering, and received her law degree from the University of Virginia in 2007. From 2007-2008, she served as a law clerk to the Honorable George P. Kazen, United States District Judge for the Southern District of Texas. Following her clerkship, Jamie joined the Harris County District Attorney's Office in 2008, where she's spent time in various divisions, including Misdemeanor, Felony, Post Conviction Writs, Child Sex Crimes, and Adult Sex Crimes.

### Celeste Byrom, Division Chief and Director of Victim Services Division

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Celeste Byrom is an Assistant District Attorney at the Harris County District Attorney's Office where she currently serves as the Division Chief and Director of Victim Services. In her role as Director, she manages 24 Victim Assistance Coordinators who provide victim advocacy to survivors of sexual assault (over 1200 child and adult sexual assault survivors were provided services during the past year) and other violent crimes. Celeste has significant experience prosecuting sexual assault offenses during her tenures in the Trial Bureau and the Crimes Against Children Division of the Harris County District Attorney's Office. She is a member of the Texas Prosecutor Society, and frequently speaks for organizations including the Texas District and County Attorneys Association and the Houston Police Department on criminal justice topics, including victims' rights in sexual assault cases. She is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Texas School of Law. Celeste serves on boards for the Alzheimer's Association – Houston & Southeast Texas Chapter and The University of Texas MD Anderson

Cancer Center, volunteers at the Houston Museum of Natural Science, and is a Sustaining Member of the Junior League of Houston, Inc.

### Dr. Amy Castillo, Chief Operating Officer, Harris Forensic Science Center

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Dr. Amy Castillo, HFSC's COO and vice president, has been working for HFSC since its establishment in 2014. Dr. Castillo worked as a forensic biology criminalist under the HPD Crime Laboratory. She became a supervisor in July 2013 and helped oversee the elimination of Houston's backlog of untested sexual assault kits. She was part of the Houston Sexual Assault Task Force that was formed under an action research project funded by the National Institute of Justice and continues to be part of the current Houston Task Force. Dr. Castillo is also a member of the State Sexual Assault Survivor Task Force. Dr. Castillo holds several patents and is an expert in semen and blood identification, differential extraction, amplification of forensic DNA, and other scientific methods related to forensic biology. Dr. Castillo completed her doctoral degree in biochemistry at the University of Houston.



### Deputy Oscar Cisneros, Deputy Investigator, Criminal Investigations Bureau, Adult Special Crimes Section, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Harris County Sheriff's Office

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Deputy Investigator, Oscar A. Cisneros, is currently assigned to the Criminal Investigations Bureau/Adult Special Crimes Section of the Harris County Sheriff's Office as the Crimes Victim Liaison. Deputy Cisneros spent eight years as a patrol deputy before being transferred to the Criminal Investigations Bureau/Domestic Violence Unit in October of 2013. In July 2016, Deputy Cisneros was transferred to the Internal Affairs Division, where he remained until August 2018, when he returned to the Criminal Investigations Bureau/Adult Special Crimes Section/Adult Sex Crimes Unit. In 2010, Deputy Cisneros obtained his TCOLE Instructor License and, in 2020, obtained his certification to become a Sexual Assault/Family Violence Special Investigator Course (SAFVIC) Instructor. Deputy Cisneros holds a Master Peace Officer License and has been employed with the Harris County Sheriff's Office since June 2001.

### Micala Clark, Legal Counsel, The Forensic Center of Excellence

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Micala Clark is currently licensed to practice law in the State of Texas. She obtained her Juris Doctor from the University of Richmond School of Law, and she obtained her undergraduate degree in Political Science from the University of Richmond, graduating with honors. After passing the Texas Bar, she began working for the Harris County District Attorney's Office. As an Assistant District Attorney, Micala did a rotation in the Family Criminal Law Division, working with survivors of family violence. She spent the majority of her time as an Assistant District Attorney in the Sex Crimes Division seeking justice for survivors of Human Trafficking, Sexual Assault, and Child Exploitation. She tried cases involving victims of sexual assault and has worked extensively with law enforcement in filing Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation cases. She currently works for the Texas Forensic Nurse Examiners: The Forensic Center of Excellence as their Legal Counsel and Director of the Adult Forensic Interviewing Program, where she assists survivors of

family violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking navigating the criminal justice system, provides legal advocacy services and supervises the Adult Forensic Interviewing Program.

### Commander Hong-Le Conn, Special Victims Division, Houston Police Department

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Commander Conn joined the Houston Police Department in 1998 and has proudly served Houston communities for 23 years. She has experience in patrol, investigations, and support services at different ranks during her career. As an officer, Commander Conn worked in the South Gessner Patrol Division and Major Offenders Division. Upon her promotion to Sergeant, she was assigned to the Northeast Patrol Division and the Jail Division. As a Lieutenant, Commander Conn worked in the Emergency Communications Division, Midwest Patrol Division, and Vice Division. Since June of 2017, Commander Conn has served in a commander capacity in the Kingwood Patrol Division, Downtown Patrol Division, Special Victims Division. As the Special Victims Division commander, Commander Conn fully believes in the victim-centered and trauma-informed approach to support and guide sexual assault victims through the investigative process. She currently serves on the Investigative Standards Committee within the Houston Police Department to standardize and improve investigative processes. Commander

Conn immigrated to the United States from Vietnam in 1987 and grew up in Houston. She attended the University of Houston – Downtown and graduated with a degree in Business Administration. She received her Master of Arts in Criminology from the University of Houston – Clearlake.

## Sonia Corrales, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)

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Sonia Corrales serves as the Deputy Chief Executive Officer at the Houston Area Women's Center. Sonia has worked in the field of domestic and sexual violence for 29 years and has 21 years of leadership experience. Specializing in anti-violence work, she has served on numerous local, state and national boards and/or committees, including Houston Sexual Assault Kit Task Force, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, Health and Human Services Commission-Task Force to Address the Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Child Abuse and Neglect, the National Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Reporting Act Working Group (SAFER), the Mayor's Commission Against Gun Violence, the Texas Teleforensic Remote Assistance Center (Tex-TRAC), UHD Advisory Board for the Master's of Nonprofit Management, Harris County Public Defender Board and the Independent Houston Police Oversight Board.

She is a graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso, alumni of Leadership Houston Class XXVI, American Leadership Forum-Criminal Justice Class 4, and of the Bank of America Neighborhood Excellence Leadership Program and Center for Houston's Future, and of Latinos for Education. Sonia is the 2016 TAASA Advocate of the Year recipient as a 2018 honoree of the Houston Business Journal Women Who Mean Business award and the 2019 Houston Texans, *Campeon de La Comunidad*, and 2021 Comcast Hispanic Hero Honoree.

## Wykesha Dixon, Program Director Bay Area Turning Point

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Wykesha Dixon currently serves as the Program Director at Bay Area Turning Point Inc. She has been serving survivors and those impacted by Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault for 9 years. Wykesha is a native Houstonian and graduate of Sam Houston State University, home of the Bearkats! She currently holds a BA in Sociology with a minor in Criminal Justice. Since she can remember, it is has been her passion and heart to help others. She has been working in the social services field for 13 years.

In her efforts to serve the community, Wykesha serves on the Harris County Death Review Team; she is the agency liaison with four different police departments for Domestic and Sexual Violence victim support services and Chair for the Domestic Violence Community Coordinated Response Chambers County, along with many other initiatives to end violence for all.

She is the mother of an amazing 6-year-old daughter, who teaches her that life moments are to be cherished and celebrated on any level. She walks by faith, trusting God, aiming to inspire and one day change the world!

### Jamie Ferrell, Clinical Director, Memorial Hermann Health System, Forensic Nursing Services

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Ms. Ferrell received her Master's in Business Administration with Healthcare Emphasis from the University of Texas, Tyler Campus, and her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from West Texas A&M University. She has 43 years of experience as a Registered Nurse with extensive practice in Emergency/Trauma Care, with the last 35 years also practicing as a Forensic Nurse/Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE). Ms. Ferrell is the Clinical Director, Forensic Nursing Services for the Memorial Hermann Health System in Houston, Texas, responsible for the care of both adult and child victims of sexual assault. She has consulted with 18 countries and 26 states, providing lectures, education and/or system analysis for professionals, multidisciplinary teams, and communities committed to improving their response for victims of interpersonal violence. Ms. Ferrell was a founding member of the first Children's Advocacy Center in Texas and her commitment to being a catalyst for change for sexual assault victim response resulted with being

featured in SELF magazine. Ms. Ferrell is an accomplished speaker both nationally and internationally and her work has been featured in various publications. She was inducted as a Distinguished Fellow to the International Association of Forensic Nursing in recognition of her humanitarian contributions.

### Monica Gonzales, Senior Litigator, Felony Trial Division, Harris County Public Defender's Office

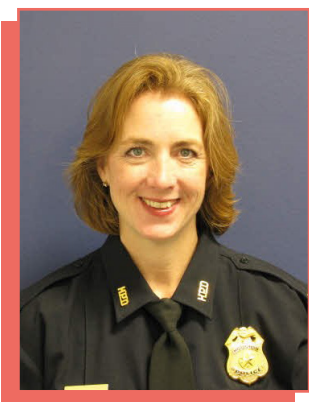
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Monica Gonzales is a graduate of Rice University, where she majored in Political Science and Policy Studies. She received her Doctor of Jurisprudence from the University of Texas School of Law. After graduating, she worked primarily in indigent defense for a total of 28 years (18 years as a private lawyer and then 10 as an assistant public defender). She began working at Harris County Public Defender's Office in 2011, where she now serves as a Senior Litigator in the Felony Trial Division.

### Lieutenant Jacinda J. Gunter, Special Victims Division, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Houston Police Department

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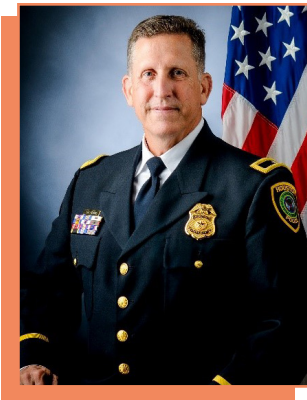


Lieutenant Jacinda Gunter is a native of Texas and graduated from Texas A&M University in 1991. She joined the Houston Police Department in 1994 and worked in various divisions of the department, including patrol, Inspections, Internal Affairs, and ultimately joined the Special Victims Division in 2011. As the lieutenant of the Adult Sex Crimes Unit, she participated in a multidisciplinary task force that received funding from the National Institute of Justice to research the reasons a massive backlog of rape kits had developed in Houston. This task force recommended best practices to prevent such problems going forward and eliminated the backlog of 6,600 Sexual Assault Kits in the HPD property room. Currently, Lieutenant Gunter sits on the steering committee of the Houston Sexual Assault Task Force that formed following the conclusion of the Sexual Assault Backlog Project. In addition to leading the Adult Sex Crimes Unit of the Special Victims Division, Lt. Gunter teaches courses on Sex Crimes investigations and Neurobiology of

Trauma to cadets and police officers at the Houston Police Academy. Lt. Gunter was also a presenter at the 2019 Conference on Crimes Against Women.

## Commander Harlan Daniel Harris, Victim Services, Houston Police Department

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Harlan Daniel Harris (Dan) is a commander in the Houston Police Department with 28 years of law enforcement experience. After graduating from college in 1983, Commander Harris was commissioned in the U.S. Army as a Field Artillery officer where he served for 10 years. In 1993, he began his law enforcement career with the Houston Police Department, rising through the ranks as a patrol officer, patrol sergeant, Homicide Division lieutenant, commander of the Property Division, Vice Division, North Patrol Division, Employee Services Division and now Victim Services Division.

Also, in 1993, Commander Harris joined the Texas Army National Guard where he served for 20 years, deploying to Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

Commander Harris graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1983 with a Bachelor of Music degree and from Sam Houston State University in 2003 with a Master of Science in Criminal Justice. He graduated from the FBI National Academy in 2013.

Commander Harris is married to Janet, his wife of 39 years.

## Courtney Head, Manager of Forensic Biology, Houston Forensic Science Center

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Courtney Head is the Manager of the Forensic Biology/DNA laboratory at the Houston Forensic Science Center. Courtney holds a bachelor's degree in Biology and a master's degree in Forensic Science with a concentration in Forensic Molecular Biology. She has over 20 years of experience in the field of Forensic Biology/DNA. Courtney has been intimately involved with the processing of thousands of sexual assault kits over her 20-year career.

She has also served as a subject matter expert on the Houston Sexual Assault task force and was part of the pilot program for the state of Texas Track Kit initiative



## Dr. Sally Henin, Chief of Medical Operations, Memorial Hermann Health Systems, Forensic Nursing Operations

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Dr. Sally Henin is the Chief of Medical Operations of Forensic Nursing for Memorial Hermann Health System in Houston, Texas and has served as Medical Director of Forensic Nursing the previous 17 years. Dr. Henin also previously served as Medical Director of Children's Safe Harbor, a Children's Advocacy Center in Conroe, Texas. In addition, she is a Board Certified Emergency Physician in the Department of Emergency Medicine for McGovern Medical School at University of Texas Health Science Center. Dr. Henin received her undergraduate degree with a Bachelor of Science in Biology and Chemistry at Houston Baptist University where she was a Meritorious Endowed Scholar. Dr. Henin received her medical degree from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas, Texas and completed her internship/residency in Emergency Medicine at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan where she was chosen as Chief Resident. Dr. Henin is currently the Chair of the American College of Emergency Physicians Forensic Medicine Section. She has previously served as co-chair of the American College of Emergency Physicians Forensic Medicine Section - Adult/Adolescent Sexual Assault Section and has also previously served as Vice-Chair and Secretary/Content Editor of the Forensic Medicine Section. Dr. Henin served on the Board of the Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council for 8 years. She is also a member of the Ray Helfer Honorary Society of physicians seeking to provide medical leadership regarding the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and research concerning child abuse and neglect. She is a Fellow of the American College of Emergency Physicians and is certified in Medical Quality by the American Board of Medical Quality. Dr. Henin has served on local, state and national committees addressing best practices for sexual assault patients and interpersonal violence patients including patients who have been victims of strangulation and/or human trafficking. She served on the Police Advisory Committee for the Houston Police Department and then later on the Public Safety Advisory Committee. Dr. Henin was a member of the City of Houston Sexual Assault Kit Task Force as part of the National Institute of Justice Grant. She also worked with Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) on the revision of Texas Department of State Health Services mandatory information sheet for sexual assault patients.

## Lieutenant Gale Johnson, Adult Special Crimes Section, Harris County Sheriff's Office

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Lieutenant Gale Johnson began his career with the Harris County Sheriff's Office more than 30 years ago. In that time, he has had numerous assignments, which include Detentions, Patrol, Internal Affairs, Recruiting, the Emergency Dispatch Center, and now the Criminal Investigations Bureau, more specifically, the Adult Special Crimes Unit. This unit includes both Domestic Violence and Adult Sex Crimes. This assignment has been one of the most rewarding to date.

## Olivia Rivers, CEO/Executive Director, The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc.

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Olivia Rivers joined The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc in 2011 as a victim advocate. She developed quickly through mentorship and served the organization as Shelter Manager, Advocacy & Education Director, and Deputy Director. The Board named her the CEO, and she resumed her new role on January 1, 2021. She completed her Bachelor's of Science in Criminal Justice and Forensic Anthropology from the University of Central Missouri and an M.S. in Criminology with an emphasis on Human Trafficking and Victimology. Olivia served as a White House intern assigned to Legislative Affairs, piquing her interest in public policy and legislative initiatives; skills she has been able to incorporate in her service to the Public Policy Committee for the Texas Council on Family Violence. She serves as the Board President for the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault and as a member of the Harris County Adult Death Review Team, the Houston Area Urban League Young Professionals, and the Harris County Child Abuse Task Force. She also volunteers her time with multiple young professional organizations in the Greater Houston

area, including the Young Professionals Group of Crime Stoppers Houston, the Young Friends of ADVA, and Women of Wardrobe, supporting Dress for Success. Her passion for serving others is coupled with her love of athletics, exercise, traveling, and reading. As she continues working in the movement to end gender-based violence, she hopes to become an author and researcher and expand her influence globally.

Olivia believes in being a voice for survivors who have not yet found theirs, and a microphone to those who have. Her hope is that advocates use their collective power to curate an ecosystem that challenges thought, transforms lives, gives space to healing, and builds global resiliency.

## Sandra Sanchez, Program Director, Forensic Nursing Harris Health System

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Sandra Sanchez has been a registered nurse for 28 years, with experience primarily in the Emergency Department and Forensic Nursing. Ms. Sanchez has been certified as a sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) since 2003 and has cared for victims of sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, and human trafficking in Harris and surrounding counties.

As the Director of the Forensic Nursing Program at Harris Health System, she oversees program operations and the practice of the forensic nursing team.

## Sergeant Tommy Smith, Adult Special Crimes Section, Harris County Sheriff's Office



Sergeant Tommy Smith is currently assigned to the Adult Special Crimes Section of the Harris County Sheriff's Office as the supervisor for the Sexual Assault Unit. Sergeant Smith was assigned to Sheriff's Office Patrol Division for ten years, with six of those years serving as Deputy Liaison to the Waller Independent School District. In 2015, he was transferred to the Criminal Investigation Bureau and served as an investigator in the Child Abuse Unit, where he remained until his promotion to the rank of Sergeant in February 2017.

Sergeant Smith's first assignment as a sergeant was at the 701 San Jacinto Jail Facility, where he served as Floor Sergeant for the maximum security floor. He served in that position until September 2017, at which time he was transferred to the Emergency Dispatch Center (Watch Command) where he served as the team leader for the 3rd watch and then team leader for the

1st watch. In June of 2020, Sergeant Smith was transferred back to the Criminal Investigations Bureau to his current position. Sergeant Smith holds a Master Peace Officer License and has been employed with the Harris County Sheriff's Office since September 2000.

## Johna Stallings, Division Chief of Adult Sex Crimes & Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office



Johna grew up in St. Louis and graduated from Illinois State University with a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice and Psychology. Johna graduated Cum Laude from South Texas College of Law in 1996. While at South Texas, Johna worked full time at the Harris County D.A. Office in the Consumer Fraud Division and had a three-year-old. She was offered a job before graduation from the Harris County District Attorney's Office, where she worked as a prosecutor for five years, including a long stint in the Child Abuse Division.

Thereafter, Johna had a private practice for about seven years and took pride assisting defendants who had severe drug and mental health issues. In 2008, she was a district court chief at the Victoria County District Attorney's Office and later, became First Assistant in 2013 until 2017. While there, she specialized in crimes against children and cyber crimes. Johna has tried

over 100 jury trials as first Chair and assisted in investigations of hundreds of sex-related, adult sex crimes and cyber crimes. In March of 2017, she returned to the Harris County District Attorney's Office and is currently the Division Chief of Adult Sex Crimes & Trafficking.

## Brenda Sykes, Executive Director, Bay Area Turning Point, Inc.

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The Board of Directors of Bay Area Turning Point, Inc. announced the appointment of Brenda Sykes as Executive Director, July of 2021.

For nearly a decade, Sykes has served in multiple roles across the Bay Area Turning Point organization, including Director of Grants & Compliance, Vice President, Chief Operating Officer, and Interim Executive Director. Throughout her career in the non-profit sector, she has focused on ensuring effective outcomes and increasing the impact of social service programs. She has extensive experience in strategic planning, organizational management, and fiscal oversight.

"We are pleased to announce Brenda as the new leader of the Bay Area Turning Point organization. Her experience, results-oriented approach, and leadership capabilities will benefit the organization and help us continue to expand our mission to end domestic and sexual violence,"

said Daniel Garrison, Board Chairman. Sykes added, "I have always been proud to work at an organization such as Bay Area Turning Point. I am honored to continue to work alongside this amazing team of professionals in pursuit of our mission."

Sykes earned her Master of Public Administration from Nelson Mandela School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Southern University and A&M College. She is actively involved with several community organizations to advance racial equality and promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace. She is a member of her church choir and has a teenage daughter.

## Emilee Whitehurst, President & CEO, Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)

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Emilee is only the fourth person to lead the Houston Area Women's Center in its nearly 45-year history. She brings over 25 years of experience leading non-governmental organizations at the grassroots level, in faith communities, the arts, and health care. Emilee has spent her career championing human rights, addressing poverty, homelessness, and abuse. She is a recipient of the Echoing Green "Social Entrepreneur" Fellowship and received the William Kennedy Public Service Fellowship from Harvard Divinity School.

Emilee holds a BA in Human Biology from Stanford University and a Masters of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School. She is an Ordained Presbyterian Minister and serves on the General Council of New Covenant Presbytery. She is an alum of Leadership Houston, and an American Leadership Forum (ALF) Senior Fellow. Most recently, Emilee served on the Mayor's Police Reform Task Force. She originally hails from Austin but considers herself a Houstonian. For the sake

of her community and, especially her two daughters, she believes in a future free from domestic abuse and sexual assault and will work until it stops.



## Wayne Young, Chief Executive Officer, The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD

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Wayne Young is the Chief Executive Officer of The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, the state- designated Local Mental Health Authority and Local Intellectual and Developmental Disability Authority for Harris County, Texas. As the CEO of one of the largest behavioral health organizations in the nation, Wayne is passionate about the planning and delivery of large-scale behavioral health and intellectual and developmental disabilities services to a population who rely upon safety net systems of care. Wayne previously served as the Chair of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission Behavioral Health Advisory Council and was recently appointed to the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health. In 2019, Wayne was honored to have been named to Modern Healthcare's list of Top 25 Innovators and to have received the Charley H. Shannon Advocate for Justice Award from NAMI Texas.

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